

# **Leader's Statement to Full Council – Wednesday 19 October 2016**

## **1. Mid Kent Services Update**

### **1.1 Recruitment**

Members will be aware that we have recently been out to advert to recruit to both the Mid Kent Services Director (MKSD) and Head of Legal Partnership roles, noting that Maidstone BC will be employing authority for the MKSD role, and Swale for the Head of Legal Partnership role. I thought it important to provide an update of where we are with this recruitment process.

We have received a very reasonable response to the MKSD post. The selection panel met on 22 September and were able to agree a longlist of ten candidates. As originally envisaged SOLACE, the appointed recruitment consultants, have been following up with the various applicants. We will then shortlist for the post on 7 November, with an assessment centre on 11 November, and final Interviews will be held on 23 November. Whilst the final decision will lie with Maidstone for this appointment, both Tunbridge Wells and ourselves will be part of the process through to final interview.

Unfortunately, the response to the Head of Legal Partnership role was disappointing in comparison. SOLACE believe the reasons for this to be: (i) generally legal is a profession where there is a shortage of good quality candidates at all levels at this time, and this is something we can confirm given recent campaigns to recruit to other legal posts; (ii) we are at a point in the economic cycle where the public sector is less attractive for lawyers; and (iii) our closeness to London affects potential candidates' willingness to apply, as the salary when compared with senior posts in London authorities is not always competitive.

Given these circumstances, the selection panel's decision, based on SOLACE's advice, was that the process of recruiting the Head of Legal Partnership should be paused. This will enable the recruitment of the MKSD to be completed in November, and allow the person appointed to be involved in the decision about how to take the Head of Legal Partnership recruitment forwards. This makes sense as the Head of Legal will report direct to the MKSD. Interim arrangements, already in place, will be extended, with Estelle Culligan continuing to be the Interim Head of the Legal Partnership, and Donna Price as the Interim Deputy Head of the Legal Partnership.

### **1.2 Changes to governance**

Members will note that a co-located meeting (between Maidstone Policy and Resources Committee, Swale Cabinet and Tunbridge Wells Cabinet) took place on 4 July to agree a number of key changes affecting MKS, as follows:

- (i) the overarching MKS governance document, including:
  - a. the rebranding of the partnership under Mid-Kent Services (MKS);
  - b. adoption of three new objectives and three new strategic priorities for the partnership; and

- c. a move to the partnership existing in perpetuity with appropriate break clauses; and
- (ii) an update of the model collaboration agreement.

### **1.3 Swale in the lead**

As members may know, each partner authority alternately acts as lead of the Partnership for a period of one year from each September. Swale has taken on this role from 1 September 2016, so for the year ahead I will be chairing MKS so have responsibility for the administration of the Partnership (e.g. hosting/chairing meetings), Mr Kara will be chairing the Chief Executives' group, and Mr Radford the Shared Service Boards.

### **1.4 Annual Report 2015/16**

The MKS Annual Report 2015/16, detailing key achievements for the shared services as well as performance and finance information for that year, has been produced by the Partnership Support Officer, and was circulated electronically to members via despatch, with hard copies available in the members' room.

## **2. Conservative Party Conference**

I wouldn't normally include this in the Leader's Statement, but on this occasion it was a good opportunity to hear first-hand the policies and direction of travel of the new Theresa May-led government of this Country.

The announcement that Article 50 will be enacted before the end of March 2017 will be welcomed by all who wish for a degree of certainty, especially for those who voted to leave the European Union.

This means that most Members in this Chamber who choose to offer themselves for re-election in May 2019 will do so as part of the structure of government of a truly independent sovereign nation.

## **3. Thames Gateway Strategic Group**

I recently attended a meeting of the Thames Gateway Strategic Group (TGSG) held in the Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) building in Westminster. The TGSG includes local government and private sector representatives from London, including the Office of the Mayor, the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership area, and the Thames Gateway South Essex area.

This meeting was chaired by the Leader of Kent County Council, Paul Carter, and was attended not only by Gavin Barwell MP, newly appointed to the post of Minister with responsibility for Thames Gateway, but also by Lord Heseltine, the Chairman of the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission.

I referred in my Leader's Statement of 21 September this year to the submission and the availability of this Council's response to the call for ideas. Lord Heseltine informed the TGSG that his Commission have received literally hundreds of responses, but unfortunately none of them were as adventurous as he would like to see. He appears to be looking for a few headline schemes similar to the London City Airport and Canary Wharf which defined the London Docklands Proposals. To quote Lord Heseltine, the responses are "more of the same, nothing transformational".

In terms of next steps, Lord Heseltine stated that his current view is that there will be a two stage report back: firstly, a report in March/April next year as to what his Commission believe should happen in the Thames Estuary by 2050; and secondly, presumably following further consultation, a final report in autumn 2017 suggesting how it should happen.

**Cllr Andrew Bowles**  
**Council Leader**